

WASHINGTON, DC - Oregon Reps. Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield), Earl Blumenauer (D-Portland), Darlene Hooley (D-West Linn), Greg Walden (R-Hood River), and David Wu (D-Portland) today criticized a decision by Attorney General John Ashcroft, to allow the revocation of drug licenses of doctors who participate in an assisted suicide using a federally controlled substance.

"The administration is only targeting Oregon, a state where physician assisted suicide is legal, regulated, and humane," said DeFazio. "Ashcroft's decision does nothing to address it in states where it's desperate, painful, and dangerous. This is an outrageous infringement upon states rights. Oregonians voted twice to uphold our state's 'Death With Dignity Act.' Not only does the Attorney General's decision overturn the will of Oregon voters, it inevitably has a chilling effect on pain treatment all over the country. Doctors will under-prescribe pain medication for terminally ill patients under the threat of federal prosecution. This is an unprecedented intrusion into the most personal and difficult decision faced by individuals and their families - the decision to relieve pain and suffering at the end of life. It sets back pain relief and care for the terminally ill by a quarter of a century."

Ashcroft's action today, overturns a 1998 decision by then-Attorney General, Janet Reno, that prevented doctors from being prosecuted for using controlled substances for physician assisted suicides. Today's decision makes it a crime for physicians to prescribe medication which could be used to cause or assist in causing a suicide. Physicians could be sentenced to twenty years in prison under this action.

"I wish that the Administration would focus on the security of all Americans at this critical time, rather than picking a fight with Oregonians on such a divisive issue," said Blumenauer.

"I am deeply disappointed that neither the President nor high-ranking officials consulted members of Oregon's congressional delegation about this decision, even though I personally asked the President to do so - to which he agreed - before taking any action that would overturn our democratically approved law," said Hooley. "At this time, the Justice Department has more important duties than turning doctors who abide by state law into criminals. Here in Oregon, the DEA has its hands full fighting a plague of methamphetamine production and abuse that is ravaging the state. I believe that federal resources would be better used fighting drug dealers who are spreading poison to our people than in investigating and prosecuting doctors who are carrying out the will of their patients in accordance with state law."

"I am disappointed by the Administration's decision to effectively overturn the will of the Oregon voters," said Walden. "If there's one thing I've heard over and over from Oregonians it is this: when does my vote count? Oregon's maverick independence stems in part from our initiative and referendum process. Both were used in the case of the assisted suicide issue and both times Oregonians spoke clearly. I will continue to defend their decision.

"This decision violates the privacy of the doctor-patient relationship and the rights of individuals," said Congressman Wu. "Oregonians have democratically decided this issue not once, but twice. At a time when we are fighting for the recognition of democratic values, the Attorney General has replaced his will for the will of Oregonians."